

Preserving Forest Grove

Newsletter of the Historic Landmarks Board



Considering the Historic Landscape

By Scott Rogers

You may not think much about it, but landscaping makes a strong impact on the overall authenticity of the exterior of your historic home. Consider landscaping that is appropriate to the period in which your home was built. You will be surprised at how much of a difference it will make.

If you think about what appealed to you about the area where you decided to buy your historic home, often times it is the large old trees or the white picket fences that helped drive your decision. Details such as this are subtle, but have a big impact. So look over your property, and see if there are any signs of old landscaping features that could help guide you. Or look around the area to see what other people have found to work well. Research your house type to see what sort of landscape would best extend and compliment the architecture of your home.

In general, period-correct landscaping can be divided into two camps: Victorian (1850-1900) and Post-Victorian (1900-1935). Each landscaping era has a distinct idea behind it that was a reflection of the times.

Landscaping of the Victorian period was often driven by the idea that people back then thought of their yards more as something to look at, rather than live in. Plantings were often used to frame views. Increased trade made new plants available for the first time, so ornamental and tropical plants were very popular- often displayed at intersections in sidewalks or at the base of steps. Although foundation plantings were not generally used, colorful annuals were very popular- often planted in intricate patterns in the center of a plot of grass. Victorians loved to plant climbing vines for

color, shade and fragrance. Larger homes often displayed beautiful cast iron urns and statuary to embellish the landscape- including sculptures of classical figures and animals. Gazebos were also popular at the time. Smaller homes would display similar garden ornamentation, though on a smaller scale appropriate to the size of the home. Back yards during this period were much more utilitarian in nature and included vegetable gardens or sometimes rose gardens. Solid-board fencing was used to separate neighboring properties.

In contrast, the landscapes of the Post-Victorian period were shaped by a different philosophy. The excess of the Victorian era was replaced with a preference for classical forms and simplicity. People wanted to re-unite with nature, and used simple designs, natural materials and craftsmanship to do so. They wanted their yards to not only be beautiful, but lived in. They designed their houses to flow into the garden, including large windows, porches, sunrooms, etc. to bring the outdoors in. Plants were placed around the foundation of the home, and around the perimeter of the property, creating a green border to frame in an open, central lawn. They emphasized low-maintenance and started using ground covers and loved perennial borders. Soft-colored perennials soon became a hallmark of this period and included both old-fashioned flowers and native wildflowers. Climbing vines were still popular at this time, as they were a beautiful way to blur the boundary between indoors and out. Fruit trees replaced ornamentals and fences were replaced with green hedges that offered more beauty and utility. Natural materials such as stone, terra cotta, brick and gravel became popular, as did birdbaths, sundials and birdhouses- all strengthening the tie with nature.

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The activity that is the subject of this publication has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, as provided through the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. However, the contents and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior, nor does the mention of any trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

These articles are taken from; "National Trust Historic Preservation" web site, provided by Mark Everett

Why Preserve?

Let's face it, the label "historic" is applied to so many different kinds of places - from ancient ruins and Gothic cathedrals to World War II battlefields and Art Deco skyscrapers - that it's sometimes hard to figure out exactly what it means. What is it that makes a place "historic"? And who decides what's "historic" and what isn't?

Clearly, it's a complicated issue - but there's a fairly simple way to approach it. Instead of asking, "Is this building historic", it may make more sense to ask, "Is this building worth saving?" When you strip away all the jargon and rhetoric, historic preservation is simply having the good sense to hang on to something - an older building or neighborhood or a piece of landscape, for instance - because it's important to us as individuals and or as a nation.

This importance may derive from several factors. Some older buildings are important simply because they're good to look at. As one author put it, they are "a gift to the street" whose style, textures, materials and charm enrich and enliven their surroundings. These buildings are worth saving because our communities would be less interesting without them.

Others are worth saving because they have plenty of good use left in them. Innovative examples of what's called "adaptive use" can be found everywhere. Factories have been turned into convention centers, train stations reborn as restaurants, mills converted into shopping centers, office buildings transformed into apartments, and on and on. This process is good for the environment; think of it as the ultimate recycling. It can be good for the pocketbook too, since reusing an old building means avoiding the expense of demolition and saving materials and craftsmanship that are costly to replace today.

Finally some places are worth saving because they link us with our past and help us understand who we are. Places like Gettysburg, the Alamo, and Independence Hall tell America's story, and we'd never allow them to be destroyed. But places that tell your story are worth saving too, the house where your grandparents lived, the school you attended, the movie theatre where you had your first date, and the church where you were married.

That's what historic preservation is really all about. It's about hanging onto what's important.

Rehabilitating a Historic Home

Rehabilitating and restoring an old building or house is an exciting challenge. Although the process can be difficult (not to mention time consuming and expensive), your hard work will be richly rewarded when you successfully complete your project.

Keep in mind that you do not have to do it yourself. There are professionals to assist you during each phase of your project; architects, architectural historians, landscape architects, contractors, suppliers, researchers, librarians and preservationists.

How to Start?

Before buying an older house, first determine the condition of the building by thoroughly inspecting it yourself or with a trained professional, such as an architect, structural engineer, or a building inspector with renovation experience. A local preservation organization can probably recommend an appropriate person. Carefully map out what you want to accomplish and budget how much money you can afford to spend.

In 1989, the National Trust's Preservation Magazine published an article on "What Every Restorer Should Know." Author Susan Morse included the Department of the Interior's "Ten Basic Principles for Sensitive Rehabilitation," also known as the "Do's and Don'ts for First-Timers and Veterans."

1. Make every effort to use the building for its original purpose.
2. Do not destroy distinctive original features.
3. Recognize all buildings as products of their own time.
4. Recognize and respect changes that have taken place over time.
5. Treat sensitively distinctive stylistic features or examples of skilled craftwork.
6. Repair rather than replace worn architectural features when possible. When replacement is necessary, new material should match the old in design, composition and color.
7. Clean facades using the gentlest methods possible. Avoid sandblasting and other damaging methods.
8. Protect and preserve affected archeological resources.
9. Compatible contemporary alterations are acceptable if they do not destroy significant historical or architectural fabric.
10. Build new additions so they can be removed without impairing the underlying structure.

The Walker House

By Elizabeth Muncher

The 1910 bungalow at 2211 A Street carries with it more historical significance than simply its age and architectural style. It was built on Walker's Addition which Elkanah Walker partitioned from his original land claim in 1872. The undeveloped lot was owned by Samuel Ammon Thurston Walker.

Samuel Walker, popularly known as "Saturday Sam" or "Fiddlin' Sam", was the son of a pioneer family with a land claim in the area of Roy. Having a talent for music, he taught himself to read music and play the violin at an early age. Among his contributions to the local community which included a term on the Forest Grove City Council, Samuel brought entertainment through his musical group, Walkers' Old-time Orchestra. He played the fiddle and his sons, Charles and Raleigh, played percussion and piano. They were a popular group in the area and even broadcast over the radio.

Samuel deeded his property on A street to his son Charles in 1909. Charles moved into his newly built bungalow in 1910. He lived there until 1927 at which time he sold the property to the Flecks and moved to Hillsboro where he was expanding his insurance business. He lived out his life in Hillsboro, another 20 years, contributing to his community as his father did. However, his parting legacy was for Forest Grove. Having no heirs he bequeathed his estate to his alma mater, Pacific University. Walker Hall bears his name in honor of his generosity.



The Samuel Walker House – 2211 A Street

Update on the A.T. Smith House

By Cheryl Hunter

It all began in 1841, when a group of missionaries in a wagon train came west looking for fertile farmland. Alvin and Abigail Smith came west with a group led by Harvey Clark. The Smiths staked a claim to 640 acres in the area adjacent to Harvey Clark's claim. The Smiths built several homes on their property with the latest one dating to the 1850s. Currently there is a group of interested citizens looking to acquire and preserve the home of A.T. Smith, the first permanent settler on the West Tualatin Plain.

The Board of the Friends of Historic Forest Grove (FHFG) formed a committee of concerned members charged to manage the long-term vision. This committee wants to update those interested in historic preservation on what is going on. Here are the highlights:

- The FHFG led by the committee has adopted the goal of turning the property into an interpretive center for our regional and agricultural history. (going back to the Native Americans who occupied the land)
- The State Historic Preservation Office is extremely interested in the preservation of this property, which they see as one of the most important houses in Oregon.
- The University of Oregon historic preservation department used the property as a case study and have created a preservation plan for the house.

If you are at all interested in helping please contact Mary Jo Morelli at 503.357.0223



The AT Smith House

Historic Landscaping

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So here are some tips on re-creating the historic landscape. In Victorian yards, use interesting focal plantings such as those from Japan or Europe, have fun with colorful annuals and limit the use of foundation plantings. Use cast-iron or painted picket fencing for the front yard, and plant vines on pergolas, arbors and trellises (but avoid growing them on the house as they can cause a lot of damage). For Post-Victorian gardens, use native plants and wildflowers to bring color to the landscape. Use stone, brick and concrete to build terracing - and keep railroad ties, decks and aggregate concrete behind the house to avoid being seen from the street. Use shrubbery instead of fencing, and don't overly prune them unless they are intended to be formal and clipped. Trees are easy to care for in any yard, and it is never too late to plant. Remember what attracted you to your neighborhood in the first place....

See your local nursery for good ideas on plant selection. They will know what is native to the area, which flowers are considered "old-fashioned" and will offer good suggestions on where and how to plant them in your yard. Take a walk around the neighborhood, taking note of what works in other people's yards. And don't forget to keep your selections appropriate to your historic home.

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Preserving Forest Grove is a quarterly newsletter published by the Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board to help fulfill its duty of public education regarding the preservation of cultural resources. If you would like to be on the mailing list, please call James Reitz at 992-3233.

The Forest Grove Historic Landmarks Board Grant Program

Is your house on our local register? If it is - did you know that your house is eligible for restoration / rehabilitation grant funding? The Historic Landmarks Board has funds to help you with your projects. If you are planning any exterior restoration work such as painting, restoring a porch or if you have structural work to do such a foundation repair, we'd love to help. We fund projects up to 50% of the cost of the job per grant. Come see us! We can also help you find historically appropriate solutions to any problems you may have.

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